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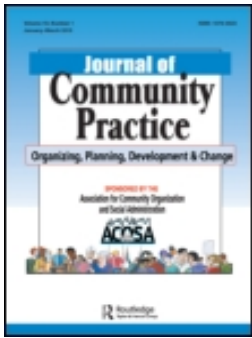
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## **Honoring, Training, and Building a Statewide Network of Elder Activists: The California Senior Leaders Program (2002–2012)**

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*This case study explores the first decade (2002–2012) of the California Senior Leaders Program (CSLP), including participants' creation of a formal advocacy group, the California Senior Leaders Alliance. Grounded in concerns with ageism and invisibility, the CSLP provides recognition and support for diverse California elders engaged in community building and social justice work. This study employs qualitative analysis of data from participant interviews, event evaluations, program documents, video footage, and participant observation. Findings show emotional, learning, and networking benefits for participants, intergenerational influences, collective capacity and coalition building, and contributions to policy. Program challenges are described, and future directions discussed.*

**KEYWORDS** *Community building, community organizing, community/civic engagement, grassroots leadership, older adults, social action, ageism*

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When asked to characterize his unique approach to community advocacy for youth development and healthy aging, 72-year-old African American Senior Leader Frank Rose responded, “I don’t think outside the box. I think outside the warehouse!” Rose’s words quickly became the motto of the California Senior Leaders Program (CSLP), which, for over a decade, has honored and engaged a diverse array of California’s older activists, most from marginalized or underserved communities. These elders work on the individual, community, and policy levels, and they are selected for participation in the CSLP in recognition of the impact and continuity of their work, as well as how they do this work—with humility, determination, creativity, and often humor. During its first 10 years (2002–2012), over 150 Californians, aged 60–102, participated in the CSLP as members of one of five cohorts. Almost two-thirds (64%) of the senior leaders are elders of color; over three-fourths (77%) women; and 9% openly identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. Participants are located throughout the state in urban and rural areas, and represent a broad range of education and income levels.

Following the framing discussion on ageism and the invisibility of elders, and a targeted review of the literature on elder volunteerism, activism, and leadership programs, this article presents a multimethod case study of the first decade of the CSLP from its inception at the School of Public Health, University of California, Berkeley in 2002 through its members’ creation and implementation of a formal advocacy group, the California Senior Leaders Alliance (CSLA). This case study examines the program’s evolution, accomplishments, challenges, and lessons learned, and it highlights future directions, including potential opportunities for replication in other states.

## THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF ELDER INVISIBILITY

The CSLP is grounded in concerns with combatting ageism—the devaluing of elders—and the related social construction of elders’ invisibility. This invisibility occurs at the interpersonal level in terms of how—or even if—old people are seen by others, whether as next in line at the grocery store or as leaders of local efforts to improve neighborhoods. Elder invisibility gets perpetuated at broader community and societal levels, including in ageist workplace conditions (Powell, 2010), scarce and stereotypic media representations of older people (Milner, Van Norman, & Milner, 2012), the vast market of antiaging products and strategies (Calasanti, 2005), and the built environment where the designs of restaurants, theaters, and even sidewalks often ignore the mobility and sensory limitations of many elders (Satariano, Ory, & Lee, 2012). Such conditions deem elders as unimportant, uninvited, and, therefore, invisible. Public policy debates that present homogenized views of elders as frail, needy, greedy, and expensive similarly obscure the true diversity, needs, and strengths of elders. Finally, and with a few notable exceptions (Hutchinson & Wexler, 2007; Narushima, 2004; Romero & Minkler,

2005; Roszak, 2001), the multifaceted and often unpaid roles of older people to help bring about change on the community or policy level as community activists have been largely overlooked. This is especially true with respect to elders of color, and those who are LGBT, immigrant, low-income, living with disabilities, or members of other marginalized groups (Stoller & Gibson, 2000).

The community work of elders, and the invisibility of that work, has particular relevance for public health educators and social workers. The overall purpose of public health is to improve the conditions in which people can be healthy (Gebbie, Rosenstock, & Hernandez, 2003; Institute of Medicine, 2003). Reducing ageism, improving elder visibility, and supporting the diverse and invaluable roles elders that play in their communities are important to this mission, and, further, they mirror social work and health education's historic commitment to strength-based practice (Nyswander, 1956; Saleebey, 1997). This commitment requires keeping communities at the center of—and visible in—a participatory process working toward social change and community well-being. Over the past decade, the CSLP has employed a commitment to strength-based practice to attain its goals of reducing ageism, improving elder visibility, and supporting elders in their community work.

## ELDER VOLUNTEERISM, ACTIVISM, AND LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS: A REVIEW

### Elder Volunteerism

Although elder activism tends to be largely invisible, a growing body of literature examines elder volunteerism generally, and a small part of that research looks at specific programs designed to encourage and facilitate activism and senior leadership. Much of the empirical research on elder volunteer work has focused on the advantages to the individual by looking at associations between the act of formal volunteering (e.g., working with a volunteer organization such as a non-profit or social service agency) and the individual volunteer's physical health and/or psychological well being. These findings, overall, suggest that there is "a positive, if modest, relationship between the two" (Musick & Wilson, 2003, p. 260). Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong, Rozario, and Tang (2003) found that whether or not the person volunteered had a significant effect on self-rated health, functional dependency, and depression. A longitudinal study of 4,646 adults ages 35 to 92 found that continuous participation in recreational or religious groups moderated depression and some of the other negative psychological effects associated with developing functional limitations, yet participation in civic groups had no significant effect (Greenfield & Marks, 2007).

In one of very few randomized trials on volunteerism, Fried and colleagues (2004) looked at health outcomes for Experience Corps' older

adult volunteers, ages 60–86, placed in public elementary schools. They found improvements in the volunteers' physical activity and strength, social support, cognitive activity, and walking speed, compared to the control group. A subsequent study of 71 Experience Corps volunteers in Baltimore, MD, concluded that long-term involvement (36 months) in the program led to sustained increases in physical activity, in contrast to outcomes of a comparison cohort (Tan et al., 2009). Finally, Butler and Eckart (2007) found that the Senior Companion Program served to strengthen interpersonal and community bonds in a rural area, while filling critical needs due to underfunded safety net programs.

Studies have identified several possible mechanisms for these relationships between volunteering and health and well being, ranging from protection against role loss and social isolation (Moen, Dempster-McClain, & Williams, 1992), to continuity and a consistent sense of self (Greenfield & Marks, 2007), to benefits of service to others (Oman, Thoresen, & McMahon, 1999), and increased physical activity (Fried et al., 2004). With a few notable exceptions (e.g., the previously noted studies of Experience Corps volunteers), however, the research on volunteerism and health and social outcomes relies on correlational designs, which prevent the determination of causal relationships (Gottlieb & Gillespie, 2008; Morrow-Howell et al., 2003). Further, the predominance of study participants who are non-Hispanic White, well educated, and with low rates of disease or disability further precludes generalizability of results to diverse populations (Martinson & Minkler, 2006; Morrow-Howell et al., 2003; Musick & Wilson, 2003).

Research has also noted several barriers to elder volunteerism. These include poor health, physical limitations, low income, low education, lack of transportation, time constraints, lack of interest, cultural values, and organizational practices that discourage participation among elders (Adler, Schwartz, & Kuskowski, 2007; Burr, Mutchler, & Caro, 2007; Butler & Eckart, 2008; Martinez, Crooks, Kim, & Tanner, 2011). Martinez et al (2011) noted that such barriers mean that low-income elders of color are often not involved in formal volunteering, but they are, indeed, engaged in other community work that is rarely captured by volunteer research. Indeed, the full range of informal volunteer contributions of the diverse population of older adults remains relatively unrecognized, understudied, and invisible.

An emerging body of literature focuses more on the organizational level of responsibility in creating meaningful opportunities for elders to be civically engaged. Calls for increased attention to organizational training and support for volunteers has sparked much of this research (Hong, Morrow-Howell, Tang, & Hinterlong, 2009; McBride & Lee, 2011; Omoto & Snyder, 2002). McBride, Greenfield, Morrow-Howell, Lee, and McCrary (2012) found in their study of organizational support for the Experience Corps elder volunteers that supervision, assistance, flexibility, provision of stipends, and recognition had distinct and varying effects on the volunteers in terms of meeting

their expectations, retention, and perception of the benefits of their volunteer work. Macduff, Netting, and O'Connor (2009) conducted an extensive review of the research that reveals the diversity of motivations, styles, and desirable time commitments among elders involved in formal volunteer programs. The authors synthesized this literature with two frameworks for conceptualizing organizational cultures and paradigms, and they concluded that volunteer coordination cannot use a predictable one-fits-all model. Rather, volunteer strategies must consider the intersections of volunteers' motivations and needs with institutional contexts and culture.

### Elder Activism

The invisibility of elders in society is reflected in the paucity of research on older adult activism or programs that support it. In stark contrast to the extensive body of research on older adult volunteerism more generally, little research explores elders' community work involving social action, community organizing, or activism. This is particularly noteworthy given the long history of older adults in social action organizations and activism, as detailed by historian Andrew Achenbaum (2006). A few qualitative studies of elder volunteers in advocacy organizations explore the subjective meanings elders have about their activism. Participation by older Canadian women in Raging Grannies—the international volunteer activist organization of social and political protest for older women—was found to have contributed to the women's sense of empowerment by providing them with experiences of mastery, contribution, purpose, self-acceptance, liberation and the ability to effect change (Narushima, 2004). Hutchinson and Wexler (2007) reported similar results with Canadian participants reporting enhanced sense of purpose and life value, confidence, personal control, and self-efficacy. As with much of the research on formal volunteerism that was not advocacy-focused, however, the majority of participants in these studies were White, middle-class women.

### Leadership Training

Little research on leadership training is specifically geared toward elders generally, or elder activism more specifically. Wilson and Simson (2003) studied the university-based Legacy Leadership Maryland program that connects life-long learning, leadership development, and civic engagement to promote elder volunteerism. The program provided the older adult participants with instruction on public policy, government, and leadership skills, placed them in internships in legislative offices during the 90-day legislative session, and then helped them seek longer-term volunteer positions in local nonprofit organizations. The purpose of the study was to ascertain how the university

could best recruit and retain elders in volunteer activity, although not necessarily in activist or social change organizations. Although the participants reported that they found the experience enjoyable and they learned a lot about public policy and government, there were mixed results in terms of their perceptions of how well their own skills and knowledge were utilized in the internships. These results speak to the need for volunteer and leadership training programs to create meaningful opportunities that match the capabilities and interests of elder volunteers. An early article on the CSLP (Romero & Minkler, 2005), focused on the first cohort to go through the program, described CSLP's initial leadership training and support activities, but without the depth of analysis or 10-year history provided here. Study findings showed that CSLP participants reported experiencing increases in social support, self-confidence, and recognition for their community work, which led some to increased opportunities to serve on government commissions, organizational boards, or other community leadership positions.

As Martinez et al. (2011) noted, "Older adults are motivated and engaged in more civic activity than has been recognized" (p.33). This invisibility of diverse elders' roles in their communities was the impetus for the birth of the CSLP. We now turn to a case study that builds on the literature on elder volunteerism, activism, and leadership training as it explores the dynamic interaction between the organizational evolution of the CSLP and the increased visibility, growth, activism, and leadership of its diverse members.

## METHODS

This case study examines the evolution and impacts of the CSLP, as well as the challenges and obstacles it faced over the years. A case study approach, as noted by Yin (2003), is particularly useful "to describe an intervention and the real-life context in which it occurred" (p. 15) and in answering the *how* or *why* questions regarding a contemporary set of events. The case study was, therefore, an effective approach for examining how the CSLP began and evolved over time; why some changes were made and other aspects of the program remained the same; how the program impacted the participants, staff, community partners, and policy change processes; and how the program dealt with challenges it faced.

As a case study "relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion" (Yin, 2003, p. 14), this case study drew data from telephone interviews with CSLP participants, participants' written and verbal evaluations of the program, archival review of reports, video footage and other project materials, and participant observation of group meetings and events over the past decade. Almost all of the CSLP participants since the project's inception ( $n = 145$ ) participated in bimonthly semistructured telephone interviews during the 12 months



following their induction into the program. Graduate student volunteers conducted these 30- to 60-min interviews, during which the participants were asked 8–10 open-ended questions about their recent community involvement, their reflections and feedback about recent CSLP events, if and how they had used lessons from the program in their own communities or other volunteer work, and any recent contact they had made with other Senior Leaders. The interviewers took extensive notes during these phone conversations, and those transcripts were used for analysis.

Additional information was gathered from written evaluations completed by program participants at every CSLP event throughout the 10-year study period, archival review of interim and final reports from each 2- to 3-year grant period, staff meeting notes, and reflections written by graduate student volunteers after they attended their first Senior Leaders event. In addition, extensive video footage of CSLP events, including interviews with Senior Leaders, were examined and provided important data. Finally, all three authors took part in participant observation of group meetings and CSLP events.

The data from this range of sources was reviewed by two of the authors, who used a modified grounded theory approach that began with the identification of open codes (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). The authors met to discuss these codes, identify emergent themes, identify common patterns across difference sources of data, combined codes into emergent themes, and then looked across the chronology of the data to develop the explanations regarding program evolution, impacts, and challenges. Triangulation of patterns and exceptions across different data sources, and discussion among the researchers about alternative explanations were critical components of the data analysis to interpret the findings (Yin, 2003).

In retrospectively examining the first 10 years of the program, we asked: (a) How has the CSLP evolved over time? (b) What influenced the decisions about what to change and what to maintain through the program's evolution? (c) How were the experiences and voices of the senior leaders, themselves, involved and integrated into program evolution? (d) What were the outcomes and challenges of the program over time—for the senior leaders, program staff, community partners, and policy change? Overall, the case study tells a story of what happened when a diverse group of elders, who were already engaged in a broad range of often-unrecognized community engagement, were brought together through a program that provided recognition and support for their continued social action and social change work.

## HONORING AND SUPPORTING OLDER ACTIVISTS: GENESIS AND EARLY EVOLUTION OF THE CSLP

With funding from The California Wellness Foundation, the CSLP was established in 2002 to provide recognition, training, and support for a select group

of elder (60+) California activists who were making sustained contributions to community building and healthy aging. Project staff and advisory committee members developed five selection criteria: leadership in healthy aging or community building, work on multiple levels of influence (individual, community, and/or state), demonstrated commitment to this work over time, likelihood of benefiting from training and support, and contribution to the diversity of the group (Romero & Minkler, 2005). A particular effort was made to identify individuals from marginalized groups whose contributions, as noted, are often less likely to be recognized and honored.

A call for nominations was circulated statewide to community-based organizations (CBOs); county health and social service departments; philanthropic organizations; grassroots groups; and faculty members in gerontology, public health, and social work. Of the 75 nominations submitted, 36 awardees, ages 60–102, were selected, with the majority from underserved communities, including five from tribal nations.

Held in Berkeley, California, a 2-day honoring and training event for the Senior Leaders included interactive workshops on media advocacy, fundraising, healthy aging, partnering across cultures, and influencing policy. The Senior Leaders also met in small interest groups with four to five other participants engaged in similar types of community work (e.g., working with youth, supporting healthy aging, advocating for healthy public policy) to share ideas and strategies. At a formal awards ceremony before friends and family, each Senior Leader then was honored with a visual and narrative summary of their contributions, an engraved plaque, and a \$500 donation to a CBO of their choosing, earmarked to support the Senior Leader's work.

An integral part of the CSLP was its intergenerational component. In addition to the public health doctoral student project director, six other graduate students participated in the pilot program, each facilitating an interest group session at the 2-day event and then following up with group members through bimonthly phone calls over the next 15 months. The students spoke with Senior Leaders about their community work and reflections on the CSLP, provided one-on-one support, and arranged for modest technical assistance as needed. The students also learned from the seniors' real world experiences and life lessons. These follow-up phone calls nourished meaningful intergenerational relationships, and provided valuable program evaluation data as the Senior Leaders described the influence of the CSLP on their work and lives and suggested areas for project improvement.

To further increase the visibility of the Senior Leaders and their community efforts, project staff members wrote personalized press releases for the Senior Leaders' local media outlets (resulting in media coverage for over two-thirds of the awardees) and gave presentations about the CSLP at professional meetings and other venues. A 20-min program video and a 90-page booklet telling the story of each Senior Leader through words and pictures

were produced for the seniors, their nominators, and others interested in the project.

### Outcomes of the CSLP Pilot Program

Written evaluations and oral feedback from Senior Leaders confirmed that the 2002–2004 CSLP succeeded in achieving its goals of increasing visibility and support for these elders and their community efforts. As one rural awardee noted, “A wonderful world opened up with the Senior Leaders award. . . . My volunteering was truly appreciated, which inspired me to want to do even more.” The group recognition as seniors doing this work was particularly important to several participants. In the words of a Native American elder, “It feels good to see an organization like UC Berkeley honor seniors for work they have been doing for years. It was an honor to be recognized with other seniors and elders, especially the other native people here.”

Senior Leaders also reported how they drew on the training received, with one, for example, using the media advocacy training to develop a campaign to save in-home and community-based services for elders and people with disabilities from proposed budget cuts. Perhaps the most notable and unanticipated outcome of the program, however, was the meaningfulness of the connections and learning that occurred between the Senior Leaders. Participants repeatedly commented on the importance of developing networks and relationships with a diverse group of elders engaged in a wide range of community projects. As one Japanese American activist noted, “It was one of the few occasions where we meet people of different backgrounds talking about their successes and their problems, and it gave me a wider perspective on what people can do.” An African American elder similarly explained, “The event was a catalyst to come together and learn and to help each other. We are now a statewide network to assist each other.”

Participant evaluations also revealed a major limitation of the pilot program: the CSLP’s lack of planned activities for reuniting the Senior Leaders after the initial 2-day event. Although the program staff did host one reunion in Berkeley that was attended by 13 Senior Leaders from the Bay Area, this did not begin to meet the needs of the full cohort.

### Building Community and Growing the CSLP

A second round of funding enabled a new cohort of Senior Leaders in 2005, with whom the program was replicated and expanded. To promote cross-cohort sharing, five of the 2002 Senior Leaders served as *peer mentors* at the second cohort’s 2-day honoring and training event. Each mentor cofacilitated with a graduate student an interest group session and built connections between the first and second cohorts of Senior Leaders. The 2005 event also

allotted more time for spontaneous sharing of knowledge and talents among participants. For example, one Senior Leader presented on the dangers of Social Security privatization, and another led the group in Lu Tung Kuen, a traditional Chinese exercise form.

The Program hosted four regional reunions in 2005–2006, giving Senior Leaders from both cohorts additional opportunities for networking. Although designed primarily as social occasions, considerable discussion of current public policy issues also took place, i.e., the then new Medicare Part D (drug benefit) legislation. With the compelling range and depth of dialogue at the reunions, the Senior Leaders requested that these meetings be offered with more frequency.

Senior Leaders also expressed interest in learning more about each other's projects to facilitate collaborations beyond the formal project. The CSLP staff therefore published *The Senior Networker*, a triannual newsletter with summaries of each regional reunion and stories on individual Senior Leader projects. Also, a program Web site was developed ([www.calseniorleaders.org](http://www.calseniorleaders.org)) that provided information on the CSLP and a brief profile of each Senior Leader.

As with the first cohort, this second group of Senior Leaders greatly appreciated the visibility and validation that came with participation in the program. As one participant noted, "I'm honored and enjoyed interacting with such great achievers and unsung heroes and heroines." A formerly homeless Senior Leader involved in advocacy work for homeless elders who, like himself, were living with mental illness and addiction, remarked, "The Senior Leaders Program brought out the leadership quality in me. Being selected for this award gives me hope as I persevere, and shows me my light is shining."

As with the previous cohort, these Senior Leaders also found utility in the knowledge and skills they gained in the program through the formal workshops and through networking with each other. As one participant remarked, "We [Senior Leaders] don't necessarily have all the answers, but we have different ways of asking the questions. We learn from each other that way."

With their growing intercohort connections and identification with the program, the Senior Leaders began asking for tangible symbols that would more formally identify them with one another and as members of the CSLP. Personalized CSLP business cards and a pin with a colorful program logo, designed by a student facilitator, were developed and given to all members of these and subsequent cohorts.

There also was an increasing call to engage in social action together as Senior Leaders, which suggested a shift from an individual identity as a California Senior Leader award winner to an additional shared identity as "the California Senior Leaders." To nurture this shared identity, and to better meet the aim of identifying a pool of elders who engaged in work

that affected change at the community, institutional, and/or policy levels, an additional criterion was added to the selection process for the third class of 30 Senior Leaders—"a demonstrated commitment to promoting social justice." As a consequence, the 2007 cohort reflected an even greater depth of experience in working toward broader social and institutional change, with a larger number of participants bringing substantial histories in community organizing and/or legislative advocacy at local, state, and sometimes national levels.

Although the format of the 2007 program was much the same as in previous years, many Senior Leaders made it clear that the time had come to take the CSLP to a new level. Looking out at a large gathering of his fellow Senior Leaders, an 80-year-old lifelong community organizer remarked that this was "the most diverse grassroots group of older people in the state" and that "we should harness the power of the group" for broader social and policy change. He and others began discussing what it would take to form a senior advocacy group to implement a shared agenda.

At the same time, many participants emphasized the need to retain the social aspects of the program—the opportunities to share personal stories and get to know each other with no formal agenda. One member warned against increasing the workload of already active elders when she asserted, "I do so much of this stuff. Please don't ask me to do any more." And another quipped, "I need to go back to school and get a PhD in chillin'!"

### PUTTING COMMUNITY INTO ACTION: THE CSLA

The Senior Leaders' call for a more formal mechanism for collective action without losing social opportunities for engagement led to the staff's successful proposal for a 3-year grant in 2008, with the first year dedicated to getting the new education and advocacy organization off the ground before a fourth cohort of Senior Leaders was brought in. A strategic planning meeting, to which all Senior Leaders were invited, laid the groundwork for a new action-focused organization, the CSLA. The 58 Senior Leaders in attendance discussed in depth why such a statewide network mattered and how it might be structured, and they drafted a mission statement and guiding principles. They further identified three key focus areas for the new organization—health care access, transportation, and elder economic security—at least one of which would be the focus of the Alliance's work each year. An annual meeting in the state capital was envisioned as an opportunity to meet with legislators, provide education, and advocate for a bill related to the selected priority issue. A subgroup of Senior Leaders helped formalize the composition and responsibilities of the new organization's Steering Committee, which would coordinate the implementation of CSLA action steps.

At its first annual meeting and advocacy event in Sacramento in April 2009, attended by over 30 Senior Leaders and four project staff members and students, the CSLA formally adopted as its mission statement: “To promote, advocate for, and contribute to the health and wellbeing of seniors, their families, and communities statewide, through a diverse and grassroots coalition of California Senior Leaders.” The group also finalized and adopted eight guiding principles, among them: “advocating for sound health and social policies that are senior-, family-, and community-friendly;” “building networks with a wide array of organizations and coalitions to magnify our collective capacity for promoting change;” “mentoring the next generation of senior leaders;” and “celebrating our diversity.”

From the start, the Senior Leaders, themselves, filled facilitation and planning roles, and program staff members served primarily as administrative support for the Steering Committee. The latter, in consultation with the full CSLA membership, selected AB 324, the Economic Dignity Act of 2009, as the bill on which to focus their initial efforts. Authored by State Assembly Member Jim Beall, AB 324 would require the state’s Department of Aging to use the recently calculated Elder Economic Security Index, rather than the 50-year-old Federal Poverty Line, in determining the needs of elders in each county throughout the state (Wallace, Padilla-Frausto, & Smith, 2010). This more accurate metric of economic security would provide the state with a realistic appraisal of the economic needs of its rapidly growing elderly population. Partnering with the nonprofit Insight Center for Community Economic Development, which had originally developed the legislation, the CSLA quickly became a valuable ally, in part because of its members’ diversity, their years of community organizing experience, and the fact that many were, themselves, economically insecure and could share the personal stories that are needed, along with statistics, for policy change (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

The CSLA’s first Education and Advocacy Day at the capitol, in support of AB 324, included a workshop on effectively talking with legislators, legislative briefings, a meeting with Assemblyman Beall, and planning meetings in which small groups of Senior Leaders developed strategies before heading to the Capitol Building to meet with their local legislators to discuss the bill. The legislative visits also served to introduce legislators to the CSLA, and a brightly designed handout summarizing the CSLA and its mission and principles was given to each legislator or aide as a leave-behind.

Although many Senior Leaders were familiar figures in the corridors of the Capitol Building, fully a third of those attending had never before met with a legislator. Pairing a more experienced advocate with Senior Leaders newer to this process provided a useful strategy and helped embolden newer participants. Moreover, postevent evaluations revealed a high level of enthusiasm and satisfaction with the inaugural CSLA event and its role in “moving toward action.” Many remarked on the role of the Sacramento



visit in increasing group visibility and “[making] the legislature aware of the Senior Leaders Alliance.” As one member declared, “We are a force to be reckoned with!”

Although AB 324 did not pass in 2009, the CSLA stayed with its signature issue when the bill was reintroduced as AB 2114 in 2010. In April 2010, 49 CSLA members attended the second annual Education and Advocacy Day in Sacramento, which was expanded to 2 days and included the newly inducted fourth cohort of Senior Leaders. In addition to legislative briefings, trainings (this time led by Senior Leaders themselves), and legislative visits, the 2010 event included a session facilitated by the Steering Committee in which all members discussed CSLA decision-making, leadership structure, and selection of future issues. In their written evaluations and subsequent phone calls with students, CSLA members reflected positively on “the gathering of old and new friends, as well as fellow advocates in the struggle for senior equality” and “exciting and rewarding visits with our lawmakers.”

AB 2114 passed the full legislative vote in 2010, but was vetoed by then-Governor Schwarzenegger. However, with the demonstrated support of the state legislature and a strong coalition of CBOs and other organizations, the third annual CSLA Sacramento meeting in May 2011 was charged with excitement over a potential win in support of the revised elder economic security bill (AB 138). The 53 Senior Leaders in attendance held a press conference and rally, which helped energize the group still further for their legislative visits. Later that summer, the state legislature passed AB 138, which Governor Jerry Brown then signed into law.

### From Single to Multiple Issue Organizing and Celebration

As Staples (2004) pointed out, as organizations mature, the move from single-to multiple-issue organizing is both more feasible and realistic, and can help increase organizational mileage and visibility. With AB 138 looking increasingly likely to pass, the CSLA added a related issue to its 2011 Sacramento event agenda—support for AB 69, a bill designed to improve access to California’s Cal Fresh (formerly Food Stamps) program. They also formed subgroups on rural issues and transportation respectively. In these ways, CSLA diversified its policy advocacy agenda and its potential influence on statewide and regional solutions.

Alinsky (1971) and other organizers (Ellis & Walton, 2012; Miller, 2009) have underscored the importance of celebrating organization victories. The fourth annual CSLA Education and Advocacy Day event in May 2012, therefore, was preceded by a day of celebration of the 10th anniversary of the CSLP. Combining historical reflections, a tribute to deceased group members, a film about the spirit and diversity of the program, and singing and dancing, the celebration was attended by 90 of the 132 living Senior Leaders from all five cohorts spanning 2002–2012. The great majority stayed to participate in

the 2-day education and advocacy event in support of the Cal Fresh bill, this time doing so wearing colorful CSLA t-shirts to increase group visibility.

In the 4 years since the initial 2008 planning meeting to envision an advocacy organization of Senior Leaders, the CSLA has become a functional and visible entity in the policy advocacy landscape of California. This Senior-Leaders-driven advocacy organization has developed its voice and successfully partnered with other organizations across the state to support policy change to improve the health and wellbeing of seniors, their families, and their communities.

### MULTILEVEL PROGRAM OUTCOMES OF THE CSLP/A

The successes of the CSLP and the CSLA occurred at individual, interpersonal, community, and policy levels. Participants experienced benefits at individual and interpersonal levels in three key ways—emotional benefits, learning opportunities, and meaningful connections with each other. The emotional benefits included feelings of joy from the positive atmosphere, appreciation for the recognition received, inspiration gained by being with other Senior Leaders, and even relief in knowing they were not alone in their commitment to serving their communities. A 2005 participant was one of many who noted how rarely such recognition occurs, saying, “Being selected as a Senior Leader was overwhelming. I felt recognized for the first time in my life.” Indeed, the Senior Leaders commented on the recognition—and the emotional impact of that recognition—throughout the first decade of the program. As a 2012 Senior Leader reflected, “It was more emotional than I had imagined. . . . People like us are just workers and are not used to getting acknowledged and getting treated so well.” Another 2012 Senior Leader added that the group recognition “helped me realize I’m not out on an island in doing good work to serve communities. It was really touching to feel I wasn’t in a silo by myself.”

The Senior Leaders frequently reported that they benefited from the opportunities to learn and build new skills through the program. Although many noted that they continue to draw on the formal trainings they received in areas like media advocacy and fundraising, the most valuable sources of learning clearly lay in the connections they made with each other. As a 2007 Senior Leader described,

I loved the stories. When you’re a leader, it’s very interesting to find out what the thought process is for other people when they are doing this kind of work. What was it like for them to grow up? What led them to want to make this kind of change in the world?

Another Senior Leader described learning from a transgender activist in her cohort about how to better reach out to LGBT seniors, and two rural Senior



Leaders shared strategies for improving transportation for seniors and people with disabilities in their respective counties.

The CSLP has affected more than just the Senior Leaders themselves. Over the past decade, the faculty liaison, four graduate student project directors, and 25 graduate student facilitators have been inspired by the Senior Leaders, learned from their experiences of aging and community engagement, and built relationships that have enhanced their own lives and work. This intergenerational component of the program proved to be a particularly meaningful aspect of the program. Over 90% of the students involved in the CSLP did not come into the project with a prior interest in gerontology, or in senior issues more broadly, but they later found themselves delightfully surprised and deeply moved by the value of connecting with the elders. As one student reflected after meeting the Senior Leaders at the 2-day recognition event,

I did not know what to expect when I became a student facilitator. All I knew was that I would love to help in honoring these seniors. However, from the first hour there, I was surprised to see myself completely engaged in conversations with the senior leaders about family and personal life experiences. It was so interesting to hear about the unique paths they have taken to reach where they are today. The relationships just kept building as the weekend progressed. I found myself wishing I had spoken in-depth with each and every senior leader there!

Year after year, the students came away energized by the Senior Leaders' stories, commitment to their communities, and determination to make a difference. Several students, after interacting with the Senior Leaders, were compelled to break away from paralyzing beliefs that meaningful change is too difficult to achieve and not worth the effort. As one student noted after facilitating a discussion among Senior Leaders involved in programs for youth,

I was inspired by the passion with which the seniors spoke out about youth development. It's easy to become frustrated and apathetic, but these senior leaders were so dedicated to working towards solutions. They sincerely wanted to see their communities flourish and they would do anything in their power to make that happen.

Another student described the inspiration he gained for social justice activism through his experience with the Senior Leaders when he wrote,

The Senior Leaders see something that so many of my younger peers seem to miss: They understand that each of us holds enormous potential to affect change. . . . Sitting at a table with the California Senior Leaders,

I heard some good advice about how to be an activist for social change. “Learn, don’t complain.” One of the seniors spoke up to modify the piece of wisdom: “Learn, *then* complain.” That’s sage advice from our elders, and I intend to follow it.

In addition to affecting individuals, the CSLP/A developed an increasing sense of community with each year of the project. Evident in the first year when a 2002 Senior Leader declared, “I believe that if we work together we can accomplish something big,” this ever-deepening fellowship has been perhaps the most profound and unexpected outcome of the project. This was particularly palpable at the 10th anniversary event in 2012, where participants repeatedly described the connection and inspiration they felt through the group. As one Senior Leader noted, “There is a genuine sense of community—acceptance, respect, openness to share, to learn, and move forward. There’s a strong sense of ‘let’s work together.’” The CSLP/A has built a dynamic, diverse, intergenerational community—and it has done so in a supportive and caring environment.

This growing community identity became the essential groundwork for the project’s transformation from focusing on the celebration of individual honorees in the CSLP to supporting the collective efforts of the CSLA. One founding member of the CSLP Advisory Committee, who has watched the program grow since its inception in 2002, commented on this impressive evolution:

Putting these committed seniors in the same room not only increased their individual skills in terms of advocacy, media, and policy, but provided them the ability to network and create a new collective capacity. After being introduced to each other, and placed in a context that promoted and celebrated their community engagement, the group spun off their own advocacy organization to engage with policy makers, started providing peer support, and developed a collective voice for collective action. That’s impressive!

While building its own community, the CSLP also positively impacted local organizations and communities with which the Senior Leaders worked. These organizations benefited from the program through the \$500 organizational gift provided to each Senior Leader’s CBO of choice, the increased visibility of local community efforts that resulted from press releases and media coverage, and the knowledge and skills that the Senior Leaders shared with others in their local projects. In addition, the CSLP had a notable impact on its funding agency. Recognizing the vast experience and diversity of the Senior Leaders, the CSLP’s primary funder, The California Wellness Foundation, invited the Senior Leaders to participate in its annual Healthy

Aging conference—and picked up the substantial costs involved. The diversity of the Senior Leaders, and the lived experience and organizing expertise they brought, led to 40-plus seats being reserved for CSLP members at each subsequent Grantee Conference.

Assessing CSLA's contributions to policy change is more difficult, because, as Sterman (2006) has noted, given the multiple players and policy levers involved in getting to policy change, it is all but impossible to tease apart the impact of one organization on a particular policy outcome. Yet policy makers and staff members from advocacy organizations have remarked on CSLA's contributions to the passage of the Elder Economic Security Index bill, its success in finding new cosponsors for the Cal Fresh expansion measure, and its growing "organizational mileage" (Staples, 2004, p. 112) and recognition among state policymakers. The managing director of the Insight Center for Community Economic Development—the organization that initially developed the Elder Economic Security Index legislation—expressed her appreciation for their partnership with CSLA and the value of Senior Leaders in speaking at press conferences, testifying at legislative hearings, and visiting legislators' offices to communicate the need for the Elder Index legislation:

When I first presented the Elder Index to the senior leaders, they immediately got excited about supporting our advocacy efforts. Before long, the CSLA was organizing rally days to educate policymakers about the struggles of low-income seniors and why we need better measures of economic security than the flawed Federal Poverty thresholds. We would not have had the success we've had without the senior leaders speaking from the heart about their experiences.

In the eyes of the Insight Center, the involvement of the Senior Leaders—and particularly, the telling of their personal stories—played a significant role in the ultimate success of the Elder Economic Security Index bill.

## REDUCING AGEISM AND INCREASING ELDER VISIBILITY

As previously noted, the CSLP was grounded from the start in concerns about ageism and the ways in which elder invisibility perpetuates and reflects the devaluing of elders in our communities. The CSLP sought to disrupt this invisibility by identifying and publicly honoring a diverse sampling of elders who, year after year, and for many decade after decade, have engaged in community efforts to improve the lives of people of many ages, races, genders, classes, sexual orientations, national origins, and mental and physical abilities. By providing recognition and support for these elders who so rarely

receive accolades for such work, the CSLP aimed to increase the visibility of these elders specifically, but also more broadly to raise consciousness about the range of roles and influences that elders can and do have in people's lives. Now, over a decade since its inception, having brought five cohorts of Senior Leaders together to celebrate their efforts (with a sixth cohort likely to be inducted in 2014), the CSLP and its advocacy arm, the CSLA, have indeed enhanced the visibility of these elders, raised awareness of the many ways that elders are interwoven through their communities, and interrupted the ageism that serves to devalue their work and lives.

This increased visibility occurred in many ways. The CSLP increased the visibility of these elders within their local communities through the nomination process itself, as well as through the local news coverage and word of mouth acknowledgement within and outside of their local networks after they received the award. For some Senior Leaders, this increased visibility led to new opportunities on community boards and agencies—invitations that resulted from their increased visibility as effective community advocates. For many, the increased visibility also enhanced the visibility of the local organization(s) with which they worked. Importantly, the CSLP/A also increased the visibility and relevance of these elders to the students who worked with the program as they learned to appreciate the value of listening to, sharing with, being in the presence of, and seeing seniors as community members, advocates, historians, friends, and partners in efforts to make positive community and social change. Now more aware of the needs and assets of a diverse senior population in California, as well as their own capacity to build relationships with such elders, these students will hopefully integrate this intergenerational experience into their public health work and personal lives.

Not only did the Senior Leaders become more visible within their own communities and among the students, they also became more visible to themselves and to each other. Throughout the past decade, participants repeatedly expressed that the recognition they received, individually and as a group, inspired their continued efforts and reminded them that they were not each “in a silo by myself,” but rather were surrounded by a diverse and supportive network of like-minded change agents. Seeing and getting to know each other helped them to see themselves as part of a broad network of elder community advocates.

This recognition as an individual that is part of a larger advocate network is also what allowed this group of elders, over time, to develop their identity and visibility as an organization of Senior Leaders with an ever-increasing collective capacity to engage in social change work. With the birth of the CSLA, their visibility and recognized capacity for influence increased among advocacy organizations and policymakers. CSLA's visibility increased among several aging policy advocacy organizations, in part because so many CSLA members were also members of those organizations, such as AARP, California

Congress of Seniors, Older Women's League, California Alliance for Retired Americans, California Senior Legislature, and Gray Panthers. These organizational relationships, in combination with the CSLA's work with new partners such as the Insight Center, UCLA Center for Health Policy, Women's Policy Institute, and California Food Policy Advocates, extended CSLA's coalition building capacity for statewide policy efforts.

The visibility of the CSLA as a diverse set of senior voices contributed to the success of policy advocacy efforts, as previously noted by the Insight Center director who said the Elder Index advocacy would not have been as successful "without the [senior] leaders speaking from the heart about their experiences." The Senior Leaders have become visible to policy makers who have met with Senior Leaders in their offices and listened to their life stories and concerns at legislative hearings. Overall, the CSLA has increasingly been recognized as the most diverse aging advocacy organization in California, and has received several requests to lend its name to letters and other appeals in support of legislative measures to improve the health and quality of life for California seniors, their families, and their communities.

All of this visibility and its consequences would not have occurred were it not for the initial effort in 2002 to identify and recognize a diverse group of elders who were engaged in community efforts—the start of the CSLP. These individual Senior Leaders, and the larger CSLP/A organization, are now more visible to themselves, their peers, their communities, their local organizations, statewide advocacy organizations, policymakers, and a younger generation of public health scholars and emerging professionals. Although we have not systematically measured the effects of this enhanced visibility in terms of how it has influenced ageism (externalized and internalized), the enhanced individual and collective capacity that resulted through the CSLP/A suggests that these voices and faces—and others like them—will continue to be heard, seen, and valued rather than pushed to the margins and ignored.

## PUTTING ELDERS AT THE CENTER IN STRENGTH-BASED PRACTICE

Reducing ageism, improving elder visibility, and supporting the diverse and invaluable roles that elders play in their communities are important components of public health and social work as they help to create conditions in which people of all ages can be healthy and thrive. Another component of public health and social work, strength-based practice (Nyswander, 1956; Saleebey, 1997), provides a powerful and effective model for decreasing ageism and increasing elder visibility by putting elders at the center of a participatory process to create social change and community well being. The CSLP, and the subsequent emergence of the CSLA, provide an excellent example of what can happen when elders—or any marginalized group—are brought out of invisibility and into the center of a strength-based process

in which the assets of seniors themselves are honored and supported in creating social change. The CSLP started with a strength-based approach to leadership—identifying the existent leadership roles held by elders and providing support for that leadership, rather than assuming that elders don't know how to be leaders and would need to be taught. Although the CSLP was initiated by university outsiders (nonseniors) who wanted to bring visibility and support to older activists, the CSLP staff created an environment in which the Senior Leaders, themselves, could explore and reflect upon what it meant to come together to share their stories and strategies, and to build relationships with one another. Time and space were provided for sharing and getting to know each other without a strict agenda or predetermination of what would come of it. Therefore, what began as an opportunity for individual recognition, training, and networking, grew quite organically into community building processes through which participants made connections and, over time, began to consider how to best utilize their growing relationships for a common cause. Providing support from the wings, the university-based program staff members listened to the seniors who discussed and decided how to harness the power of the group into a more formal advocacy organization. The program staff, with additional support from its primary funder, then provided support to help actualize those plans for the CSLA. The community building that was so essential to the ultimate decision to form the Alliance meant that the elders valued the staff members as part of the intergenerational community. Importantly, however, the Senior Leaders held the key roles in guiding the CSLA, and have remained at the center of its governance, decision-making, and social action. The CSLP thus evolved—from individual recognition and support to a community building process from which trusting relationships were formed, which then inspired the community organizing efforts of the senior-centered CSLA.

## CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Although the CSLP and CSLA experienced many successes over the last decade, the programs faced some key challenges, with corresponding lessons learned.

### Diversity

Although the diversity of the CSLP along multiple dimensions was celebrated as one of its greatest strengths, it also presented challenges. Language differences posed a particular obstacle. Four Senior Leaders who spoke little English appreciated the recognition but did not experience the same learning opportunities or interpersonal connections as their peers due to linguistic

barriers. Some participants with hearing impairments also expressed frustration or a sense of isolation when they were not able to hear presentations or discussions.

Lessons learned: Revise selection criteria to match current program capacity, and increase program capacity to accommodate Senior Leaders when possible.

Accommodating monolingual, non-English speakers proved to be beyond the current capacity of the program, so having some English proficiency became a selection criterion. At the same time, the program learned to better accommodate a few Senior Leaders who primarily spoke Spanish or Punjabi but understood English well by pairing them with student facilitators who also spoke their native language. Although not an ideal solution, these pairings highlighted the importance of maintaining linguistic diversity among the project staff and students.

To better accommodate Senior Leaders with hearing impairments, roving microphones were used in large group discussions whenever possible, front row seating was provided for those who desired it, quieter venues were sought for meetings, and participants with hearing or mobility impairments were invited to bring an assistant to events at the Program's expense.

The other key challenge with regard to diversity concerned the intercultural conflicts that can come from unconscious prejudice and discrimination. Overall, the Senior Leaders exhibited a high level of what Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998) termed "cultural humility" (p. 117). The seniors listened openly to each other and saw each other's differences without passing judgment or reinforcing the power inequities that so many of these elders sought to eliminate through their community projects. Nevertheless, hurtful interactions occurred that included men talking over women, a White participant devaluing a Black participant, and middle-class elders making assumptions about the lives and behaviors of low-income people.

Lesson learned: Incorporate training on cultural humility and "critical self-reflection on power and privilege" (Hyde, 2012, p. 428) into the CSLP.

The deliberate integration of a training module on cultural humility, including tools such as Hyde's (2012) Cultural Identity Inventory, would fit well into the biennial training and recognition event that honors each new cohort of Senior Leaders. Such training would further institutionalize the values of cultural humility, openness, and celebration of diversity that have always been central to the CSLP.



## Student Staffing

The CSLP is predominantly staffed by graduate students. Although this intergenerational component has been meaningful to all involved, students have competing priorities and eventually graduate. With five different student project directors since CSLP's inception, and with student facilitators graduating every 2 years, maintaining program continuity was itself a challenge.

Lessons learned: Leadership development for project directors, clear expectations for student facilitators, and a staff transition plan are essential for program growth and continuity.

Beginning in 2009, an additional student was hired as assistant director to help manage the increasing workload of CSLP/A. This student shadowed the project director so that when the director graduated, the now-experienced assistant transitioned easily into the project director role. Program continuity and institutional memory were also enhanced with thorough documentation of each event and meeting, and with improved communication with student facilitators regarding time commitment and responsibilities required for the position. The increasing role of the Senior Leaders themselves, such as in planning and running meetings of the CSLA Steering Committee and taking leadership roles in full group events, also helped address this challenge.

## Organizational Capacity of CSLA

The CSLA Steering Committee, made up of 2–3 Senior Leaders from each cohort, served as an effective coordinating body for the CSLA. Program staff honored the autonomy of the Alliance, and provided primarily administrative and technical support for the committee. Difficulties arose, however, when the Steering Committee or larger CSLA membership had ideas for the project that exceeded the staffing and budget capacities of the program.

Lesson learned: Improve organizational communication and increase project capacity where possible.

Clear communication with the Steering Committee—the liaison between the CSLA membership and program staff—became increasingly important so that the Committee could mediate requests from the larger membership that exceeded program capacity. The program also sought and obtained additional funding specifically to support the CSLA and its advocacy work, and increased staffing to support program expansion. Developing a plan for economic sustainability beyond present funding sources will also be essential for building capacity (see Future Development and Replication).



## CSLA Issue Selection

The breadth of the CSLA's three areas of focus—health care, transportation, and economic security—presented a challenge for the Steering Committee as it facilitated the selection of the annual signature issues and legislative bills on which to focus.

Lesson learned: Increase opportunities for membership input throughout the year for greater participation and transparency in issue selection.

The Steering Committee increased its communication with the larger membership through presentations and listening sessions at regional reunions and CSLA events. Alliance members were invited to nominate issues for consideration, and these issues were then vetted and discussed in committee meetings before being narrowed and presented back to the large group. Interest groups additionally were formed in two particular areas—rural issues and transportation—to give smaller groups of Senior Leaders a way to pursue these issues even if the larger group was not yet involved.

## Funding

The longtime funder of the CSLP supported the idea of developing the CSLA advocacy group as a means of training seniors in policy advocacy, enhancing leadership capacity, and promoting healthy aging. However, the funder's restrictions on lobbying and its initial hesitancy to fund advocacy work focused on specific legislation posed a challenge.

Lesson learned: Develop a diversified funding strategy to match various program activities with appropriate funders.

To address the funder's concerns, the 2010 annual CSLA event added a special training with members to differentiate between educating policymakers (allowable under the terms of the grant) and lobbying. Wording was changed in event materials to reflect this educational focus, but uncertainty remained concerning the funder's parameters for advocacy. The program therefore sought and obtained a \$50,000 grant from a social change-focused organization, The Atlantic Philanthropies, in support of CSLA's advocacy activities for specific legislative measures. The Steering Committee members and staff also received donations and created a small, unrestricted account in support of this work.

## Transportation

The CSLP covered all of the transportation costs (e.g., airfare, car mileage, bus fare) to and from CSLP/A events. Challenges arose, however, in

arranging transportation for Senior Leaders who did not drive, lived far from airports, or preferred not to travel alone. This proved especially difficult for the participants living in rural areas.

Lesson learned: Enhance access to other modes of transportation.

Whenever possible, the CSLP staff coordinated carpools, and family members or caregivers who drove Senior Leaders were compensated for mileage. Attention was also given to recruiting more than one Senior Leader from isolated areas to encourage joint travel.

## FUTURE DEVELOPMENT AND REPLICATION

The CSLP has been extremely fortunate in having a primary funder that has been unwavering in its support over the past decade. The program's university home also has remained committed to the project, and organizations in Sacramento and elsewhere have donated space, materials, and discounted food for regional reunions and Sacramento meetings. The CSLP's major funder (The California Wellness Foundation) recently signaled its willingness to provide a final 15 months of support for the CSLP, with a smaller but much needed \$50,000 grant also received from The Atlantic Philanthropies to continue its support of the advocacy work of the CSLA. In December 2014, however, the CSLP will close shop as a university-based program, and the CSLA will spin off to become an independent entity under the fiscal sponsorship of a larger nonprofit aging or advocacy organization yet to be identified. Special funding for a sustainability consultant and grant writer/fundraiser, the creation of a Sustainability Committee within the CSLA, and a careful timeline for moving forward, should allow for a seamless transition as the Alliance takes its work to the next level. The development of a system for the nomination and election of a small and diverse cadre of new CSLA members each year, albeit without the structural advantages formerly provided by the CSLP, also will help ensure the advocacy organization's continued growth. Finally, the CSLA's recent implementation of a voluntary dues/donation structure for members and supporters is helping the organization not only build its discretionary funds but also demonstrate the personal commitment of members as it seeks to build a diversified funding structure.

We also have taken seriously the expressions of interest in program replications in other geographic areas, and are actively following up with universities and other entities to offer technical assistance and to help encourage adaptation of the CSLP/A. Development of a more user-friendly project Web site, a replication handbook, and presentations and professional meetings at interested universities and other venues also are taking place, and will help to support replication efforts.

Certainly, replication of the CSLP will involve adapting efforts to meet local needs, interests, and processes. The CSLP may be unique, particularly because the community building and organizing processes involved are, by definition, increasingly community-driven, rather than strictly prescribed. Similarly, some of the ingredients that went into the CSLP were somewhat idiosyncratic, e.g., a long-term funder already committed to honoring and recognizing older volunteers, and a progressive state in which local chapters of many activist elder organizations have flourished. As a result of such idiosyncrasies, the outcomes of CSLP's 10-year effort are not generalizable. At the same time, several elements of the program do appear to be ripe for adaptation and replication in other states and settings. Universities with departments in areas such as gerontology, public health, and social work, may be well positioned to mount an intergenerational program like the CSLP that identifies, honors, and supports elders who are engaged in community and social change work. Similarly, many foundations that fund programs to support healthy aging, leadership, or campus-community partnerships may find such a program of interest. Indeed, one university in the northwest United States has expressed interest in developing a program like the CSLP, leaving open whether engaged elders might, in turn, help spawn a value-added advocacy arm like the CSLA. Meanwhile, building an elder advocacy group like the CSLA has proved of interest to several organizations and a university in the southwest. In this case, local adaptations have already been discussed. The CSLA-type organization would likely be focused in the major city, rather than statewide, due to transportation limitations in this largely rural state, or it may focus on a particular racial/ethnic group (e.g., Native Americans in a given geographic region). Colleagues there have also suggested that the logical hub of such an elder advocacy organization might be a preexisting nonprofit organization, such as a senior citizen law center, rather than a university. We look forward to continued conversations with these and other interested entities about potential replications and adaptations of the CSLP and/or the CSLA.

## CONCLUSION

As the late Gray Panthers' founder, Maggie Kuhn (1991), was fond of saying, "The old, having the benefit of life experience, the time to get things done, and the least to lose by sticking their necks out, are in a perfect position to serve as advocates for the larger public good" (p. 38). When such elders come together to share their stories and strategies with each other in an elder-centered environment, they benefit individually and interpersonally, and may then imagine ways of combining their energies to achieve collective goals. Drawing on their life experiences and diverse backgrounds, elder activists also have a great deal to teach college students who often thirst for real world

exposures and experiences to supplement and bring alive the theories and methodologies they learn in the classroom. The CSLP and its offspring, the elder-created CSLA, have proven promising mechanisms for increasing the visibility of elders in their communities, advocating for the public good, and encouraging the next generation of activists. Furthermore, by making a special effort to include a majority of members from marginalized or otherwise underserved communities, the CSLP has helped bring public and policy-maker attention to the strengths and contributions of older advocates beyond the usual suspects more closely identified with larger, predominantly White and middle-class elder organizations. This, in turn, increases awareness of the strengths, needs, and voices within these diverse communities.

The CSLP is an example of what Macduff et al. (2009) named a “social change volunteer organization” that “provides a place where [members] can revolutionize the way in which things are done” and in which “change and action are embedded in the goals” (p. 411). Indeed, change and action are what the Senior Leaders are all about—that’s why they were nominated as Senior Leaders—and the Senior Leader-centered CSLA allows them to employ that drive for change and action collectively. As the CSLP/A moves forward and addresses new opportunities and challenges, it may indeed prove a useful model for replication. Particularly with the aging of the baby boom generation that will not “go gentle into that good night,” the potential for—and need to support—elder activism and alliances with younger allies has rarely been greater.

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